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DIRECTORATE OF
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Scientific and Technical Intelligence Report

The Soviet Decisionmaking Process for the Selection of Weapon Systems

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SENSITIVE INTELLIGENCE SOURCES
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THE SOVIET DECISIONMAKING PROCESS FOR THE SELECTION OF WEAPON SYSTEMS

Project Officer

[redacted]

OSI-STIR/TCS/73-12

June 1973

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

DIRECTORATE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

OFFICE OF SCIENTIFIC INTELLIGENCE

PREFACE

A better understanding of the Soviet decisionmaking process in weapon selection is important because it can shed light not only on many long-standing, unresolved questions about the process itself but also on the Soviet strategic buildup of the past 5 to 6 years and the course of Soviet strategic policy in relation to the continuing SALT negotiations. To gain a better understanding of the structure and operation of the Soviet process, this report analyzes the *internal factors* that influence such selections. [redacted] The principal internal factors comprise institutional arrangements, the interaction among party, government, and military establishments, the communication process in the bureaucracies, and the role of special interest groups.

The focus in this study is on the operational aspects of the Soviet decisionmaking process. The report attempts to furnish some insight into how the Soviet central leadership handles trade-offs among competing weapon systems and how it forges a coherent line of national policy in the weapons R&D sector. Because the information at hand is incomplete and because ambiguity is inherent in much of it, the judgments herein must be regarded as tentative.

The report is based in part on analysis done under contract [redacted] It was prepared by the Office of Scientific Intelligence and coordinated within CIA. The cutoff date for information is April 1973. [redacted]

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PROBLEM

To characterize the decisionmaking process whereby the Soviet weapon systems are selected for development.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The most important national-level Soviet institutions involved in the selection of weapon systems for development are the "defense subgroup"* of the Politburo, the Defense Council, and the Military-Industrial Commission.

2. Interaction between the Politburo defense subgroup and the Defense Council generally precedes the formulation of a Politburo subgroup position on any decision. The Defense Council's major function probably is to obtain substantive agreement between the Politburo subgroup and the military leadership. Such decisions are, therefore, made within a closed system operating within the slightly larger closed system of political decisionmaking.

3. Twenty-five to thirty key individuals probably exercise real influence regularly upon important decisions on weapon systems. They are to be found in the Politburo, the Central Committee Secretariat, the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Defense, the Defense Council, the Military-Industrial Commission, and the defense industries, as well as in the economic planning, scientific, and intelligence bureaucracies.

4. The political leadership appears not to have a capability independent of the military establishment to analyze and to correlate military requirements with what is feasible technologically and economically. If such capabilities exist only in the military establishment, it implies that the political leadership may play more the role of a mediator than that of a leader in dealing with issues presented by the contending interest groups. This method of operation, however, may not represent a failing in the Soviet view. The system may slant decisions in favor of the defense sector, but the results seem to be such that the Soviet political leaders, with few exceptions, probably view them as satisfactory.

5. Soviet political leaders are under pressure to assure an equitable and politically congenial distribution of the armament business. Institutional pressure groups, regional interests, and the political ties of individual leaders to party constituencies in

*The term "defense subgroup" has been applied to an informal group in the Politburo having primary responsibility for defense matters. This term does not denote a separate institutional entity.

particular industrial centers all play some part in shaping the decisions and in parcelling out resources. These influences may on occasion help to assure the continuation of weapons R&D programs beyond the point where a rational and systematic assessment might dictate changes or cancellations.

6. The Ministry of Defense, the major consumer of the products of advanced military technology, is at the same time a central participant in the process that generates such production. The ministry and its subordinate agencies dominate in the framing of the technological choices of technologies to be pursued and weapons to be deployed, but the political leadership exercises final authority over all major weapon decisions.

7. The military services play the leading role in the initiation of weapon systems R&D programs because of their institutional incentives, special expertise, organizational continuity, and close and continuing association with the designers and producers of new weapons. The initiative in weapons R&D is also occasionally taken by top-level Ministry of Defense and General Staff personnel or by weapons designers and their staffs. The close link between the various parts of the defense industry sector and the military services almost certainly has led to a network of interest groups comprised of weapons design and production organizations in industry and their military customers. These two groups jointly promote programs which further their institutional interests.

TRENDS

The consensus building approach which characterizes the decisionmaking process on weapon selection at the Soviet summit is not likely to change significantly as long as the present composition of the political leadership continues to operate on the basis of the principle of collectivity. The tendency of the political leaders to depend on the advice of the military leaders probably will continue under the existing regime, though the political leaders undoubtedly will retain full authority for making final decisions. Any significant future reduction of resources allocated to the defense sector as a result of SALT as well as any increase in civilian goods at the expense of the defense sector would probably intensify competition for resources within the defense sector and increase tension at all levels of the Soviet decisionmaking hierarchy.

DISCUSSION

SUMMIT OF DECISIONMAKING STRUCTURE

The resolution of issues at the summit of the Soviet decisionmaking system is accomplished more through informal procedures and predecision consensus building than through formal deliberative processes. Most decisions, nevertheless, eventually receive a formal stamp of approval by an appropriate body.

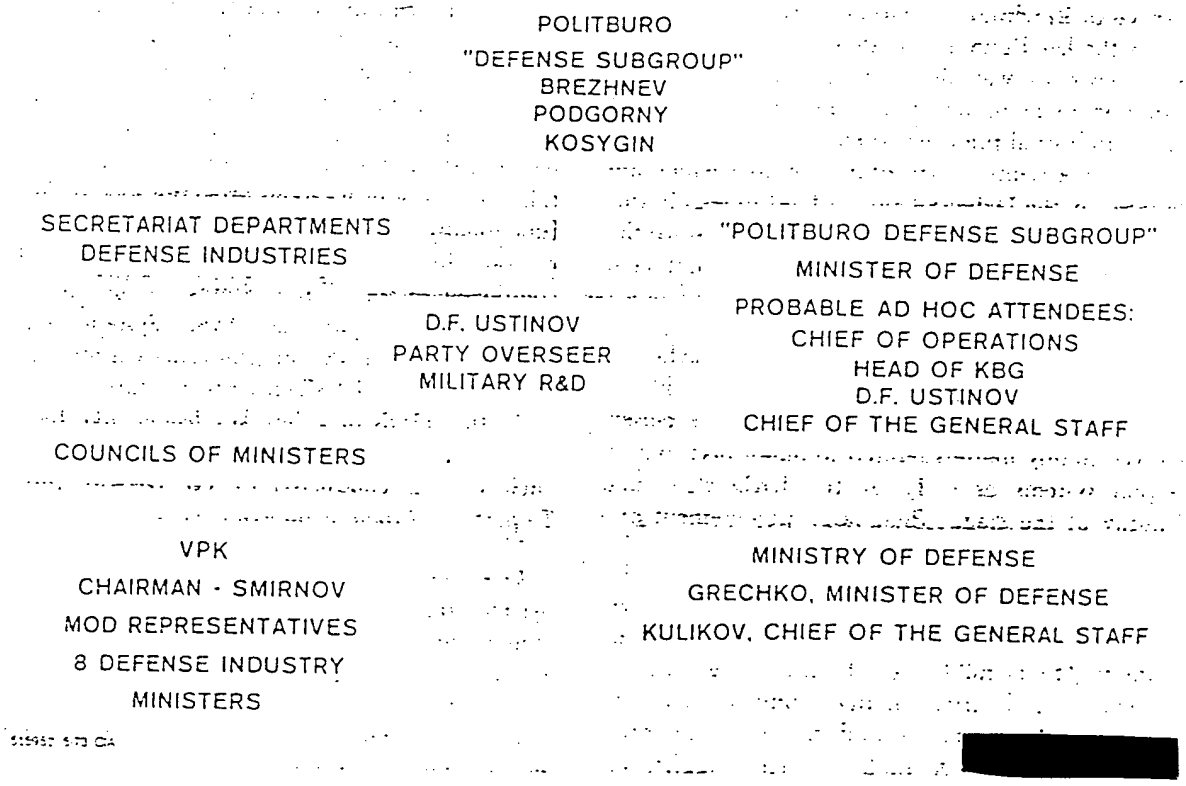
The most important organizations involved in weapons decisions at the national level in the USSR are: (1) the Politburo as a whole and its "defense subgroup," which includes Brezhnev, Kosygin, Podgornyy, and possibly others; (2) the Defense Council, a group also headed by Brezhnev which periodically brings together top political and military leaders; (3) and the Military-Industrial Commission (VPK), an assemblage of high-ranking defense industry and Ministry of Defense officials presided over by L.V. Smirnov but responsible to Central Committee Secretary D.F. Ustinov. Ustinov, overseer of military R&D and production activities, next to Party Secretary Brezhnev, probably is the most important civilian having to do with decisions on weapons development and procurement (see figure 1).

It is probable that only 25 to 30 men regularly exercise real influence upon important Soviet weapons system decisions and, with the exception of the Politburo defense subgroup, these top men are representatives of the defense industrial establishment or are military professionals. The final decision, however, is in the hands of Brezhnev and his fellow Politburo members.

The various functional departments of the Central Committee Secretariat, over which Brezhnev presides, may furnish staff support to the Politburo defense subgroup and the Defense Council on weapon policy issues. The Defense Industries Department, in

FIGURE 1

THE SUMMIT STRUCTURE OF SOVIET WEAPONS R&D POLICYMAKING



particular, which is headed by I.D. Serbin but which also serves Ustinov as a support staff on defense-industrial matters, provides support for Brezhnev. Ustinov also is at Brezhnev's call for expert counsel on a wide range of weapons development and procurement issues, although in view of his long and intimate involvement with the military-industrial establishment, Ustinov's advice in this field may not be altogether without a proarmaments bias.

The Politburo defense subgroup probably meets whenever Brezhnev or its members identify problems requiring attention. After appropriate staffing and framing of solutions, the members seek to arrive at a consensus to be presented to the full Politburo for a formal decision. Most issues are probably seldom debated at length by the whole Politburo, but laid before it as staffed-out propositions on a lengthy agenda of aye-or-nay items. How often a proposed decision of the defense subgroup may meet objection and what techniques of persuasion may be employed to achieve a substantial consensus among the voting members of the Politburo, are not known. It is probable that what most frequently happens is that explicit showdowns are avoided by prior informal coordination between the defense subgroup and at least a voting majority of the full Politburo. One of the chief practical consequences of this aspect of the decisionmaking process would seem to be that, once agreement has been reached within the defense subgroup, major alternatives at the full Politburo level are probably effectively foreclosed.

The Defense Council may meet periodically at fixed intervals for broad-range policy review. Most of its sessions, however, are probably irregular, issue-oriented, and attended on a need-to-know basis. It is unclear whether the solutions to issues taken up in the Defense Council reflect predominately the views and outlook of the military and the defense-industrial establishment representatives, or whether proposals advocated by them are customarily challenged and diluted by Politburo subgroup members. The Politburo subgroup has ties and responsibilities

extending into various areas of the national life and are in a position to express the countering voice of nonmilitary institutional forces if they so choose. This course of action, however, is probably extraordinarily sensitive to Brezhnev's personal power and inclinations as the key figure in the defense subgroup. If he has the power to sway his subgroup colleagues and the inclination to favor policy positions slanted toward military-industrial priorities, then it would seem likely that the agreements and recommendations which are produced by the Defense Council tend to lean in this direction. The general trend of Soviet policy since the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime came to office does not seem to contradict this proposition.

It appears that, given the importance attached to weapons policy at the Soviet summit, it is highly probable that the defense subgroup becomes closely involved in any matters related to major decisions on weapon systems as early as the R&D stage and certainly at the stage when large procurement and deployment decisions fall due.

A particular category of issues which may occasionally rise to the summit concerns disputes that are internal to the military establishment, centering on such matters as doctrinal changes, competition among the services for resources and missions, and other similar types of issues. [redacted] the military leaders attempt to settle such issues in-house, but occasionally disputes may move upward. This is likely to be the case if rivalry between the ministerial level of the military establishment and the General Staff [redacted] should preclude presentation of a unified military position to the political leaders. It is also probable that individual military leaders enjoying close ties with powerful political patrons at the summit may sometimes violate institutional discipline to skip channels and lobby at the summit on behalf of their particular project or service.

The summit of the Soviet decisionmaking system has the characteristics which appear to be conducive to overriding parochial bureaucratic pressures and imposing a higher national stamp on Soviet defense policy. It is comprised of a small group of powerful senior political and military officials from the relevant institutions involved in defense matters. Internal communication on policy issues appears to be frequent and very good among the officials involved in the decisionmaking process.

It has not been possible to ascertain the extent to which the Soviet policy summit achieves a rational and integrated weapons policy. The extent to which it fails in this respect may stem from its apparent dependence for advice from the bureaucracies whose institutional interests are most at stake. Despite the small and close-knit character of the policy summit, there is, for example, no evidence of the existence of an organization which is independent of the military and which is staffed to appraise routinely and systematically the worth of weapons programs in a manner that functionally coordinates needs with means. The kind of cost-effectiveness analysis of new weapons that is conducted in the United States by such essentially supra-military organs as OASD Systems Analysis, DDR&E, and the NSC Program Analysis Staff appears to be done in the USSR either by military professionals or in the minds of a few key leaders like Brezhnev, Kosygin, and Ustinov. While there is a possibility that such work is conducted by the Defense Industries Department, there is no evidence of it.

Over the past decade there has been an emergent systems analysis discipline in the Soviet Union that is potentially capable of providing an integrative cost-effectiveness appraisal of weapons programs for the top leadership. Up to the present, however, this activity too seems to be seated within the military establishment. The institutional setting, therefore, at the top of the Soviet system seems such that the political leaders are probably strongly inclined to accept weapons programs that the military professionals say they need and that are considered feasible.

As long as the top leaders perceive no overriding economic pressures toward restraint in military programs, the built-in bias of the decisionmaking system appears to be conducive to the determined expansion of military R&D along lines which satisfy all or most military advocates of new programs. If this is the case, then the summit may be less a medium in which unitary, purposive direction by the top leadership produces optimum integrated policy choices than a forum for arbitrating among policy initiatives presented by contending bureaucracies.

Viewed in the context of results achieved, what has been identified as a probable shortcoming may not represent a failing at all in the eyes of the Soviet leaders. The operation of the system may tilt decisions in a defense direction, but the results seem such that

the Soviet leaders, with a few exceptions, probably do not view them as unsatisfactory. Indeed, the leadership may be sufficiently impressed with the system's record that they do not see any need to change it.

SOVIET SCIENCE POLICY AND MILITARY R&D

The Soviet decisionmaking process for the selection of weapon systems for development appears to encompass three substantive categories of policy: pre-weapons-program decisions on science and technology; decisions on specific weapons development programs; and decisions on production, force sizing, and deployment. These three categories of decisions are related but are probably distinguishable in terms of participants and procedures.

The decisions on science and technology for military purposes probably involve a broad array of participants. They include the defense-associated scientific research institutes and their parent ministries, the Ministry of Defense and service clients, the Military-Industrial Commission, Ustinov and the Secretariat, Gosplan, the State Committee for Science and Technology, and the Academy of Sciences. Ultimately, major questions of R&D strategy and their aggregate resource implications probably come before the Politburo. The comparative weight of the professional military in this area of policymaking probably is considerably less than in weapons development decisions, if only because of the size of the policy area. The military is, nevertheless, influential at this stage through its voice in high-level policy councils and its Scientific-Technical Committees. The military also exerts its influence through its research institutes, the institutes of the Academy of Sciences, and the higher educational institutes that are engaged in the preliminary stages of military R&D.

Major decisions on basic military R&D strategy and funding in the Soviet Union appear to be much less closely tied to specific weapons programs than is usually the case in the United States. Considerable R&D activity appears to be directed toward advancing the general state-of-the-art in certain military technology areas rather than being undertaken in support of specific weapon system developments. Whatever its merits as a way of accomplishing military R&D, this Soviet style has several significant implications for decisionmaking. Soviet decisions on science and technology are not easily framed to answer the question of how much to spend on what. This somewhat open-ended approach to much of military R&D has a tendency to generate open-ended growth in expenditures. This is a tendency the Soviet leaders may wish to curb, judging from recent expressions of concern about the escalating costs of military R&D, and warnings that steady expansion of resource inputs cannot go on forever. On the other hand, the Soviet style of open-ended R&D has certain advantages which those who manage it may not wish to forego. It permits them, for example, to delay decisions on specific weapons development programs until fairly late in the evolution of new technology. This, in effect, reduces planning uncertainty. In turn, this would seem to place Soviet decisionmakers in a favorable position to make force sizing and deployment plans at the onset of specific weapons development programs.

At the second major decisionmaking stage, one involving specific weapons development programs, the circle of participants tends to narrow, and the relationship between the defense industrial bureaucracy and the military establishment becomes more pronounced. Besides participation of higher political authorities at two major decision points—approval of program initiation, and approval of series production—it is very probable that the summit machinery exercises fairly close monitoring of a major R&D program throughout its course by key Politburo members, particularly through Central Committee Secretary Ustinov.

The Soviet leaders appear to be under some pressure to assure an equitable and politically congenial distribution of the armament business. Institutional pressure groups, regional interests, the political ties of individual leaders to party constituencies all probably play some part in the shaping of decisions and in the parcelling out of resources. With regard to ICBM programs in particular, distributing the business among different design teams and development centers may have influenced the ICBM mix and posture that actually evolved.

Related to the phenomenon of distributing the armament business is the apparent tendency within the system for an institutional claim on a given share of resources, once established, to perpetuate itself. It has not been determined how much weight to give this factor as an important internal determinant of military policy decisions. Nevertheless, when the interests of various powerful bureaucracies collide,

some fairly simple solution to bureaucratic rivalries may be imposed to keep organizational peace within the system.

INITIATION OF WEAPONS SYSTEMS REQUIREMENTS

The Ministry of Defense and its subordinant agencies dominate in the framing of the choices as to which technologies will be pursued and which weapons deployed, but the top political leaders exercise final authority over all major weapons decisions.

To the early sixties, responsibility for managing advanced military technology was apparently dispersed among the technical directorates of the services and various special commissions outside the military establishment itself. In the early sixties, agencies of both the Ministry of Defense and General Staff levels took over increased responsibility for advanced weapons policy and the interservice coordination of R&D. This function from the mid-sixties on tended to center largely in the General Staff under the forceful leadership of Marshal Zakharov. By 1970 another shift giving the ministerial level a stronger hold on the coordinating function appears to have begun. Meanwhile, the technical directorates of the military services have displayed considerable continuity, and their close ties with the defense-industrial organizations in which the actual conduct of most military R&D takes place seem to have continued undisturbed. Against this background, several points stand out.

The settling down of the Soviet military R&D system after its organizational pains in the early sixties and its subsequent contributions to the successful strategic buildup under the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime have probably enhanced the prestige and influence of the military establishment. This in turn could have fortified the tendency of the present regime to "leave things in the hands of the marshals" so far as the routine management of the weapons development process is concerned.

Though most of the major weapons development and deployment decisions under the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime can perhaps be credited to a coherent policy pursued by a strong General Staff, it is by no means clear how military service interests have been brought to bear at the ministerial levels. It is very probable, however, that much of the initiation of new weapon systems R&D lies with the military services. They have the institutional incentives, the special expertise, organizational continuity, and a close and continuing relationship with the designers and producers of new weaponry. Should a jurisdictional conflict arise between the General Staff and the ministerial level, as may now be the case, this could portend an even more open field for service initiatives. The power to initiate new programs, however, as well as to settle interservice competition, certainly resides at the General Staff and ministerial levels.

The Minister of Defense is probably the chief representative of the Soviet military in dealings with the political leadership, while the Chief of Staff runs the armed forces. However, there is probably a more subtle set of relationships in which interaction with the political leadership is conditioned both by the personal stature and the institutional weight of the two top spokesmen of the military establishment. It is possible that Zakharov's replacement as Chief of Staff by a much less prestigious officer may give the Minister of Defense more room to press his own views on weapons R&D issues at the summit.

The best [redacted] accounts of how typical development programs unfold are those related to Soviet aircraft systems. While the sequential phases of aircraft development in part apply to Soviet ballistic missile development programs, [redacted] missile development has not settled precisely into all the routines and procedures followed in aircraft development. It appears, for example, that the Soviets have reduced to some extent the competitive prototype approach to ballistic missile development that they still find suitable for aircraft development. Earlier commitment to production for at least some missile systems, such as the SS-9 and SS-11, also appears to have taken place, in contrast with the customary practice of deferring production decisions on aircraft until the completion of successful testing. Essentially the same practices appear to apply in the case of both aircraft and missile systems in the requirement and program approval phase of the weapons development process—its first and most critical phase.

The first step in the process of initiating a program requirement is probably the emergence from a given service—or perhaps in the General Staff—of a comparatively unrefined perception of the need for a new weapon system (see table). This perception could develop out of specific operational problems or a

TABLE

Review Process for Weapons Requirements

1. *Identify New Weapon System Need*
2. *Explore Technical Method for Meeting Need*
3. *Determine Technical Feasibility*
4. *Military Service Sounds Out MOD, General Staff*
5. *Top Level Military Authorities Consult Ustinov, Brezhnev*
6. *Weapons Requirement Draft Prepared*
7. *Military Service Command Review*
8. *General Staff and MOD Review*
9. *Smirnov, Ustinov Review*
10. *Review By Appropriate Defense Industry Ministries*
11. *VPK Review*
12. *Ustinov Consults Gosplan on Resources*
13. *Defense Council Review*

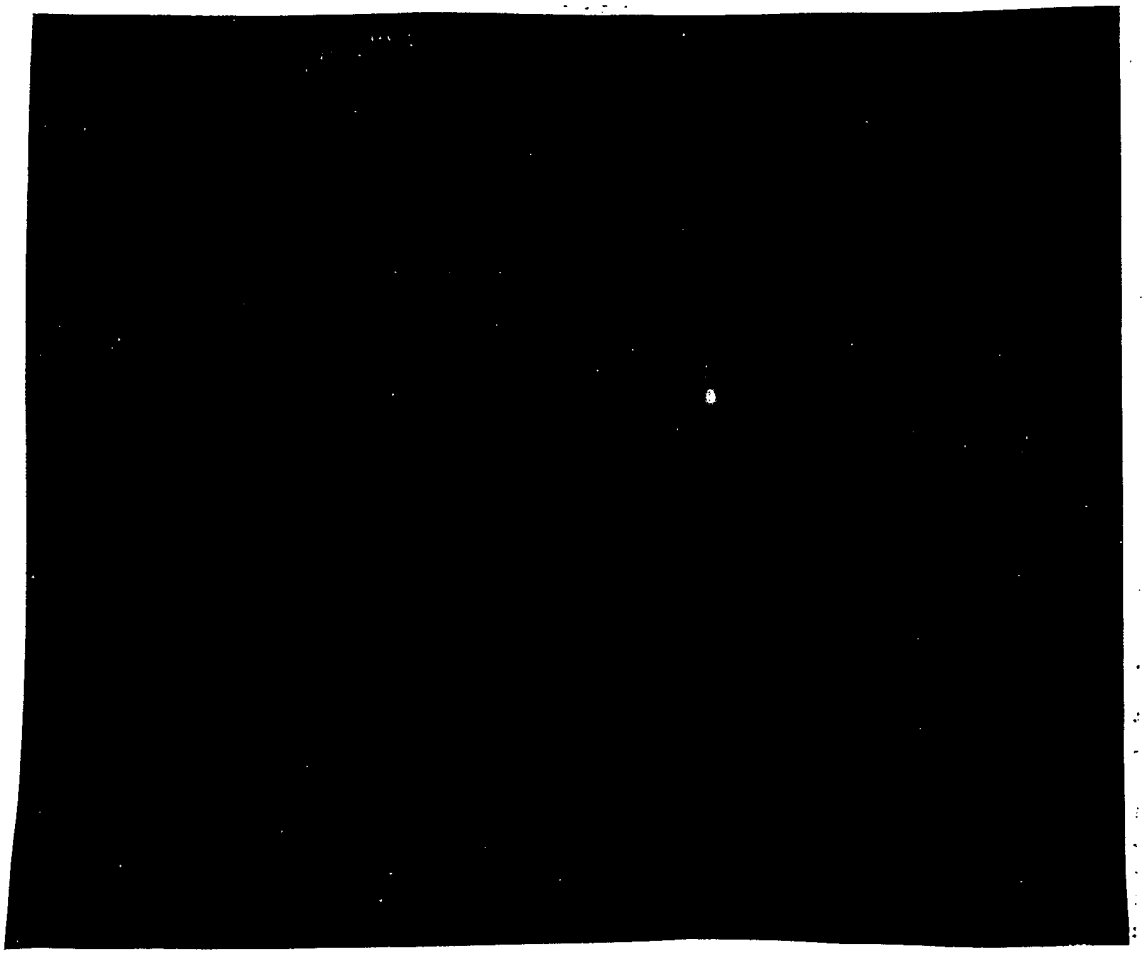
general appraisal of future weapons requirements, as well as out of perceived weapons developments in other countries, or the desire of a particular service to augment its institutional stature by acquisition of new hardware. Before formal action is taken, a good deal of informal lateral and vertical consultation probably occurs at various levels within the military and R&D establishments. In the case of a major program proposal, efforts are probably made to sound out the receptivity of political authorities, at least as high as Ustinov. If the environment is found reasonably favorable, formal action then begins with a draft statement of tactical-technical requirements, generated in a main technical directorate with advice from the main service staff. Thereafter, the proposal moves upward for general Staff or ministry approval. If the proposal is endorsed there, then it probably enters the Ustinov-VPK-Gosplan nexus for appraisal as to technological and economic feasibility before formal tactical technical task approval clears the way for actual development to begin.

DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION OF ADVANCED MILITARY TECHNOLOGY

Weapons designers and their staffs probably respond largely to the requirements developed by their service clients, but they may also play a significant role in the initiation of new weapons development programs. The willingness of the services to initiate a requirement at a designer's request is probably enhanced if, as it appears, all weapons development programs are funded directly through the state budget to the industrial ministries, not via the Ministry of Defense budget. With regard to design practice, probably the designers are more conservative than the military services in generating design concepts which carry high risks. Because the designers may pay a higher penalty for technological gambles that are not successful and because the military has occasionally bemoaned the conservatism of Soviet design traditions, the military probably is more prone to seek substantial technological advances in new weaponry.

It is probable that special interest ties have developed between the various military services and those organizations in the defense industry sector which develop and produce weapons [redacted]

Program initiation decisions are probably the most crucial ones in the weapons development process but everything does not flow automatically thereafter. Development programs must pass numerous decision



points, at any one of which a program can be altered or terminated. The apparent tendency of the policy summit to lean on professional military advice at the inception of high-priority development programs does not appear in practice to diminish appreciably as the development cycle proceeds. In fact, the Soviets usually press a given program through to deployable hardware and then modify later, rather than alter designs early in the development phase.

All Soviet weapons development programs do not grind forward inexorably to foreordained deployment; even some successful developments have not been deployed. The Soviet planning system may be one in which the force sizing implications of weapons programs are faced to some degree at the outset of development. The mixed history of various projects in the ICBM, ABM, and aircraft fields, however, suggests that early consideration of force requirements does not necessarily drive the planning and decision process thereafter. Rather, it appears that some procurement and deployment decisions have been strung out over a considerable period after R&D completion, depending on a variety of internal and external conditions affecting the decisionmaking envrionment. Moreover, just as certain institutional factors may increase pressures on the leadership for early and firm commitment to production and deployment, others tend to lighten such pressures. Since the maintenance of a large military R&D and production base, for example, is an explicit priority of Soviet national planning, decisions to defer or even cancel major projects do not tend to spread organization disruption through the middle and lower echelons of the system. However, the particular military service whose favorite interests have been negatively affected may find it less easy to take the situation in stride.

Compartmentation in the Soviet system appears on occasion to have a negative effect on the quality of decisions on weapon selection. At the top of the Soviet

decisionmaking system, it appears that the existence of a need-to-know philosophy has tended to narrow the circle of active participants in important decisions and has helped maintain the closed character of the decisionmaking system. How strictly the need-to-know principle has been applied at the top and how it may have lent itself to internal political maneuver and the exclusion of certain viewpoints on defense decisions is unclear. At lower echelons of the Soviet bureaucracies, however, compartmental barriers, in part, may have limited interaction between those who should properly cooperate in the development of complex weapon systems. [redacted] Other reasons probably contributed to this anomaly, but compartmentation may have been at least a contributing factor.

The performance of the defense sector, if measured only in terms of end product development and production, appears in general to be superior to that of the civilian sector. One important factor contributing to the performance of the defense sector is the direct top-level party supervision of the sector. Party supervision since 1965 has been an important factor contributing to the ability of defense sector administrators, scientists, and designers to cut through red tape and establish the communications necessary for expeditious decisionmaking. Priority assistance by local party organizations is also an important factor. Another factor is that the defense industrial system serves a powerful customer—the military establishment, which is in a position to exert pressure for access to resources and talent which no sector of the civilian economy can match. A third factor is the continuity, experience, and long-term association of the top-level management in this sector.

The practice in the Soviet Union of placing civilian production requirements on the defense industrial ministries is one which seems to have been long resisted by the defense industrial managers and their chief customer—the military establishment. Recent statements by Brezhnev and others that civilian output of the defense sector is to be increased may indicate that an internal bureaucratic struggle is developing around questions that could greatly affect the defense policymaking environment.

The issue on which any such bureaucratic struggle could be expected to center would be the perennial one of the balance of military and civilian priorities in the Soviet economy. In brief, the present Soviet leaders undoubtedly are prepared to devote at least as high a resources priority to military purposes as they did during the strategic buildup of the sixties. Whether they will consider it necessary to do so, in light of the achievement of strategic equality with the United States and other changes in the internal and external position of the Soviets since they came to power, is a question to which only the future holds an answer.

REFERENCES

The source references supporting this paper are identified in a list published separately. Copies of the list are available to authorized personnel and may be obtained from the originating office through regular channels. Requests for the list of references should include the publication number and date of this report.